

FORUM

NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTINGENT, ADJUNCT, AND PART-TIME FACULTY (CAP)

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CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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From the Editor

Janice Albert

When I asked the non-tenure-track committee to find another editor for *FORUM*, it was not because of burnout. Rather, I had looked around and noticed that *FORUM* was marginalized in a way that adjuncts everywhere are. That is, while the other CCCC journals rotate their editorships on a regular basis following a well-defined procedure, the *FORUM* editorship was an indefinite assignment, as though the prospect of continued issues would always be vaguely in doubt. While the editors of *CCC* and *TETYC* sit on the NCTE Executive Committee, the *FORUM* editor is sometimes included, sometimes not, and sometimes greeted with “Who?” The editorship needs to be treated with the same formal respect that all editorships are. Now, a committee has been formed and the search is on. Look around among your colleagues. Is there someone who likes to write, feels strongly about the English teaching profession, and is fairly well organized? Send the name of your candidate to Kristen McGowan at NCTE Headquarters, kmcgowan@ncte.org. Kristen will pass your nomination to the search committee. Don’t delay! The committee hopes to have made its choice by the end of the year.

When I accepted this editorship in March of 2001, I took over from Bobby Kirby-Werner, whom I knew from the 1997 Washington DC meeting of the Councils of Learned Societies on the abuse of contingent labor. Bobby’s work established the continuity of *FORUM*, and I wanted to build on her efforts to make the newsletter something that adjuncts and others could turn to with interest. In this job, I’ve been thoughtfully aided by Deborah Normand, Jim McDonald, and Laurie Delaney, chairs and co-chairs of the Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-time Faculty. On the production end, I could not have survived without the good humor and unstinting patience of Carol Schanche of NCTE headquarter’s publica-

About *Forum*

Forum is published twice a year by the Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-Time Faculty (CAP) of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome you to submit news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses. Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the winter issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

Submit your work electronically via e-mail or an e-mail attachment. Address your work to jmalbert2002@earthlink.net and put the words "*Forum* article" somewhere in your subject line. Submissions should include the following information:

- your name
- your title(s)
- your institution(s)
- home address and phone number; institutional address(es) and phone number(s)
- if applicable, venue(s) where submission was published or presented previously

For additional guidelines or information about *Forum*, contact Janice Albert, *Forum* editor, 565 Bellevue Ave., Suite 1704, Oakland, CA 94610 or phone (510) 839-1140.

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tions staff. All NCTE members ought to be proud of the standards and professionalism of the Publications office, and the new editor will take comfort in this resource.

One might think that the editor of *FORUM* would be a part-timer, but that is not the case with me. I had already taught for 35 years as a fully tenured faculty member in the California community college system. Over the years, I had watched the part-time contingent grow from zero to about 60% of my department. I knew that these younger people had more training in composition than I had had when I began teaching, yet they were paid far less, received no benefits—yadda, yadda. We are all by now familiar with the differences.

Upon retirement, I thought to continue teaching a course or two, and so I applied to a variety of colleges in the area to see what that would be like. This is when I got my real education into the condition of employment for adjuncts.

My name became "staff." Because sections taught by part-timers are often the first to be cancelled, their names are often not included in the schedule. As "Albert," I had a reputation and even a following. As "staff," I had no history at all, and got the students who had enrolled late or who were avoiding instructors with established reputations in quality control. Tough sledding.

As a newcomer, I relied on the administration to orient me to the rules and folkways of my workplace. What I got instead was a series of rude shocks. I had to ferret out answers to basic questions such as these: Would my paycheck be mailed to

we are, office-sitting for tenured or tenure-track faculty is a pleasant way to make connections that may help our careers.

Maren Bradley Anderson is adjunct professor at Western Oregon University where she has been office-hopping for three years. In addition, she teaches writing and literature online through the University of Phoenix, and scores essays online for the Educational Testing Service.

Book Reviews

Disciplined Minds

by Jeff Schmidt, Rowman and Littlefield, 2000

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd

The biographical blurb on the back cover of *Disciplined Minds* informs us that the author, Jeff Schmidt, “was an editor at *Physics Today* for nineteen years, until he was fired for writing this provocative book.” Given this tantalizing information, the reader anticipates quite a hot potato, and indeed this book is a vigorous polemic against the sort of career that Schmidt nonetheless managed to occupy for just less than two decades. To be more accurate, it is an assault on the formal education that entitles one to hold such a position, with graduate departments presented as nightmare spaces of petty humiliation and brute indoctrination.

Schmidt defines a professional job as one that requires post-graduate credentialing, largely inferring the content of actual professional work from the training process. He argues that various boundary-maintaining events, such as qualifying exams, hide their deeply ideological functions behind the façade of neutral meritocracy. Disguised as tests of competence, what the various trials of graduate work really instill is an ethic of conformity to prevailing social relations.

Schmidt argues that the apparent autonomy of professional work necessitates a far more rigorous standard of socialization, in one memorable chapter drawing parallels between professional training and the literature on brainwashing and cult indoctrination. What sort of person does the disciplinary apparatus of the universities aim to produce? “The qualifying attitude is an uncritical subordinate one The resulting professional is an obedient thinker, an intellectual property whom the employer can trust to experiment, theorize, innovate and create safely within the confines of an assigned ideology.”

Within the already narrowed focus on the training aspect of the professions, Schmidt primarily offers as examples the eccentric strata of physical and social scientists whose trade requires doctoral work. While he indicates that professional work claims 1 in 8 of this country’s employees, the PhDs he actually focuses on are

a bare 1 in 100 of the adult population. About MBAs and JDs, Schmidt has little to say, and about MDs only slightly more, although many would agree that medical residency is an excellent example of the sort of inhuman training regimen he decries. Instead, Schmidt mainly looks at doctoral programs in physics, and spends a great deal of time grinding axes with his own alma mater, the University of California at Irvine.

The notion that examinations are designed to rank and order individuals within pernicious hierarchies, producing in the process thoroughly indoctrinated and docile subjects, will not be novel to anyone familiar with the work of Michel Foucault. Nor will the implication of scientific rationality in the destructive designs of the military industrial complex shock anyone who has encountered the critical theories of Herbert Marcuse or C. Wright Mills. There is an oddly retro feel to Schmidt's critical project, amplified in his anachronistic opening vignette about *Wall Street Journal* reading, suit and tie clad "organization men" taking the train in from Westchester County to Wall Street. Still, the well-seasoned nature of this critique does not necessarily invalidate it.

Schmidt's argument lacks the conceptual rigor evinced by the best of his critical forebears; happily, it also lacks the commitment to impenetrable, jargon-filled prose. While breezy and accessible, *Disciplined Minds* is also very often an annoying little book, filled with unwieldy generalizations, multiple internal contradictions, and plainly personal vendettas. Moreover, Schmidt's proposed strategies of resistance to professional indoctrination follow an unreconstructed Marxist design every bit as ideologically dogmatic as the system he criticizes. Nonetheless, those of us who have navigated the sort of system he describes, with whatever degree of success, will likely be forced to concede that he also very often gets it right.

All of us have encountered the sort of sinister and egotistical professors that populate the pages of this book, and all of us have weathered examinations that seem more tests of endurance and conformity than instruments of enlightened pedagogy. Very likely, most of us, like the hapless grad students Schmidt depicts, have awakened at some point or another to wonder just how the process of "professional socialization" managed to take us so far from our original, idealistic visions of the academic life. For those of us now employed in the professorate, this book poses the uncomfortable challenge of examining to what extent we now contribute to the reproduction of a "soul-battering system" of professional indoctrination.

But how did Jeff Schmidt himself manage to negotiate the minefield of professional training and employment while not being turned into an ideological clone? He did so, he tells us, by being a "radical professional," and he offers a detailed blueprint for how to achieve this contradictory status. Unless you have a pretty

good cushion in your bank account, I recommend following these provisions with prudent restraint. Given the practical design of radical professionalism—basically the relentless subversion of an employer's intentions, as well as of the overall capitalist system—one cannot help but think that more than this book was implicated in Schmidt's eventual dismissal from *Physics Today*.

Richard Lloyd is assistant professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University. His book, Neo-Bohemia: Culture and Capital in Postindustrial Chicago, will be published by Routledge in October of 2005.

New Strategies in College Teaching

edited by Stephen Dragin, Allyn and Bacon, 2002

Reviewed by Jessica L. Evans

Allyn and Bacon's *New Strategies in College Teaching*, which compiles chapters excerpted from eight Allyn and Bacon higher education texts, may offer several chapters of use to adjuncts—particularly those without practical experience or theoretical grounding in pedagogy—but comprehensively, the text proves far more successful in explicating longstanding theory and strategy than offering essentially “new” advice.

Perhaps the most problematic assumption driving this text is an ambiguous notion of what exactly “new” denotes. Chapter one offers an overview of changes inherent among college campuses within the last generation but—considering it explicitly specifies its audience as part-time instructors—disregards that these changes have been apparent throughout classrooms for at least two decades. Certainly, the majority of professionals within the field today recognize that their students may vary in age and ethnicity, may work part- or full-time jobs, and may come from “dysfunctional” or “blended” families; in fact, the instructors themselves may exhibit these characteristics. Likewise, recent recruits in higher education would be hard pressed to have never encountered Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983), and if not, one might be better off exploring the original source or one of its numerous incarnations rather than the two-paragraph synopsis presented here. At the end of the first chapter, however, appears a gem, “What Students Want from College Instructors,” which emphasizes efficiency, sensitivity, and a positive approach to interaction with students. An adjunct would surely benefit from reviewing Lyons's list of expectations students have of teacher conduct, such as “consistently positive treatment of individual students, including a willingness to spend extra time before or after class meetings . . .” and “classroom demeanor that includes humor and spontaneity.”